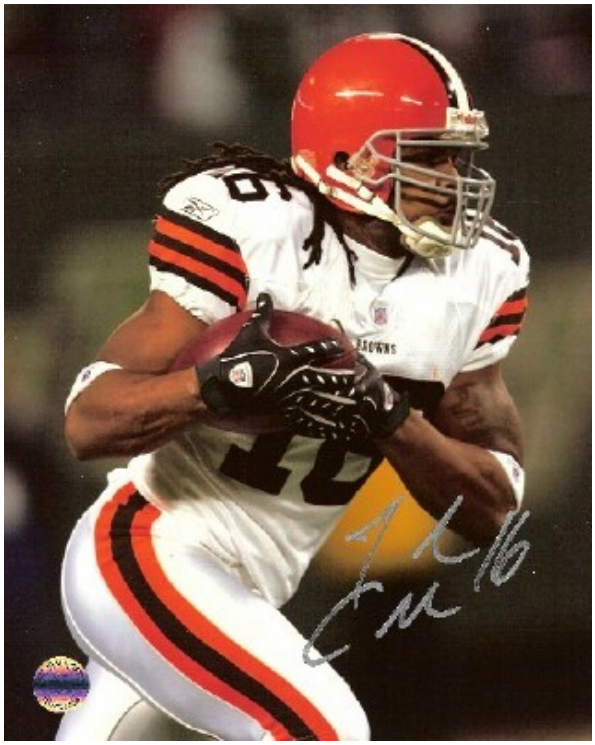


To really appreciate the vagaries and cruelties of professional football, consider the 24-hour period that started midday on Thursday and carried over to midday on Friday. In that short span, the Cleveland Browns waived goodbye to Brodney Pool, told Jerome Harrison that records notwithstanding he's worth only a 2nd round pick and re-worked the contract and significantly increased the pay of special teams ace Josh Cribbs.

In one sense or another, all of these moves and all of the others the Browns made, including the trading of Corey Williams to Detroit, are related and have one common denominator, money.

Cribbs and the Browns on Friday announced a new $20 million/3-year agreement that includes $7.5 million guaranteed. If he hits all of the incentives in it, he'll be the highest paid special teams player in the game.

It brings an end to a soap opera that was starting to rival *Mary Worth* for its near daily dose of drama. Since early last season and continuing, basically, through this week the Browns and Cribbs have either been really close on a new deal or miles apart, depending on who's talking.

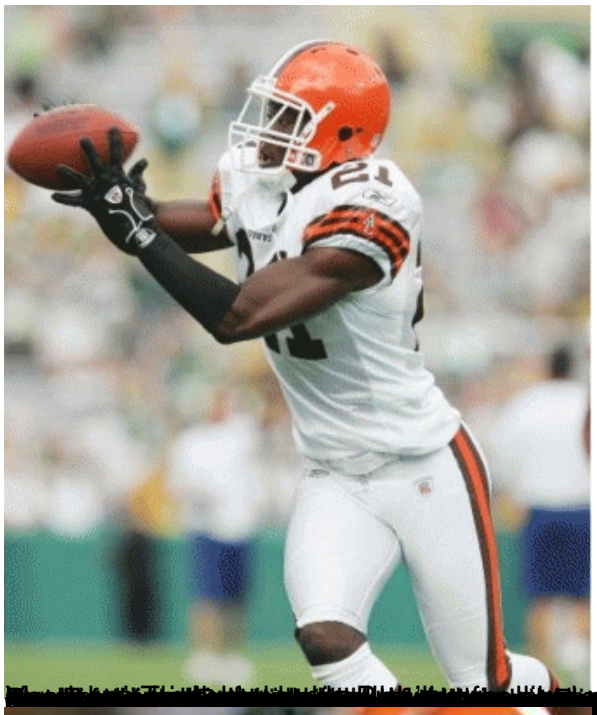
Cribbs' agent, J.R. Rickert, proved to be mostly a hack in handling these negotiations, combining illogical threats with bad timing while his client, as earnest as a player can get, wore his heart on his sleeve. In the end, the Browns lived up to the promises of both former general manager Phil Savage and owner Randy Lerner by acknowledging that in context Cribbs' contract was a tad undervalued. Good for Cribbs.

Of course the fact that it was undervalued was the function of shrewd negotiations by Savage but this was an issue that needed to be addressed. Cribbs, along with Joe Thomas, represent the only two credible players on this team. Fans, abused by misanthropes like Braylon Edwards, at least could feel real pride toward these two.

The problem, though, with Cribbs is that determining his value has always been a problem. He's easily one of the best special teams players in the league. A gifted kick returner, he's also a key cog on covering kicks as well.

If that was the extent of his resume, then figuring his contract isn't all that difficult and it's probably close to what he already was being paid. But Cribbs' instincts as a runner make him an intriguing play on offense. The problem, though, is that while he's done well at times in spot duty, he's not a particularly gifted receiver at this point and his presence all but signals the next play. It's this aspect of his game though that makes figuring out his overall value so difficult.

Now Cribbs has his money and he's happy. Brodney Pool, not so much.



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